

Newsletter Spring 2010

Giving everyone a voice

Advocacy is about standing up for a person and taking their side.

Advocacy is about standing alongside people who are in danger of being pushed to the margins of society.

Citizen Advocacy means we ask an ordinary member of the community, who is unpaid, to advocate for just one person. This can be for the short term, focusing on one or more issues or long term with the partnership lasting as long as both people want.

Direct advocacy is issue based and time limited. It is provided by a member of staff.

Adult Support and Protection

An advocate, matched with a young man with Downs Syndrome, has noticed he becomes upset at the prospect of returning to the group home he lives in. He refuses to say why and doesn't want the advocate to "make a fuss" but the advocate has noticed he flinches whenever anyone makes a sudden movement...

All too often we hear stories like these; there is a concern, but does it merit doing something about it? It can be a difficult dilemma when, as advocates, we may feel torn between doing what our partner wants and acting in their best interest.

Now there is a new law which can help; The Adult Support and Protection Act gives councils new powers to investigate and act when they believe an adult may be at risk of harm. It sets out who can be considered an adult at risk, what harm means, some guiding principles that should be followed by anyone who is carrying out a duty under the act and the powers and duties given to councils and other public bodies.

An adult is thought to be at risk if they are aged 16 years or over and

- Are unable to safeguard themselves, their property, rights or other interests;
- Are at risk of harm, and
- Because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, are more vulnerable to being harmed than others who are not so affected.

As a result, Equal Say has adopted new adult protection procedures, which means that where we think an individual could be considered an adult at risk and we believe they are at risk of harm, we will make a report to the council, so that they can investigate.

The Act makes it clear that the consent of the individual adult at risk is crucial throughout any investigation and when any action is being taken. Advocates can have an important role to play,

- By looking out for their partner and being aware of their responsibility to tell their co-ordinator at Equal Say if they have any concerns that their advocacy partner may be an adult at risk.
- By being involved in supporting their advocacy partner if there is an investigation, so that they fully understand what is happening and are able to make clear choices about what they wish to happen.

continued...

If you have any concerns at all about the well being of your advocacy partner, you should speak to your advocacy co-ordinator or call the Partick office and ask for Sam or Amanda. We will be happy to discuss your concerns with you and help you to decide on the best course of action. Of course, wherever possible, you should try to have your advocacy partner's permission to do so.

Later in the year, we will be running a training session on the Adult Support and Protection Act; if you wish more information and we would encourage you to attend. See opposite for more details.

Amanda Muir

Investing in Ideas - Success

BIG LOTTERY FUND

Supported by

In December 2009 we were pleased to hear that the Big Lottery approved a maximum £10,000 grant to Equal Say to carry out a research project. The Board was very pleased that the Big committee, once again, supported our work. This project may well lay the foundations for a future grant application to further enhance the range of support we can offer people who face increasingly complex advocacy issues.

Many of the people we advocate for have issues which involve civil law. We have deliberately avoided research into people with learning disabilities and criminal law as there are many other organisations leading on this. Civil law issues range from people being detained under the Mental Health Act, being subject to guardianship under the Adults with Incapacity Act or more mainstream issues around compensation claims or Children's Hearings.

We have noticed an increase in legal issues in recent years and the staff team have commented on the varied nature of people's knowledge about when or how to access legal representation and the varied nature of outcomes for people depending on how their lawyer acts.

Stirling University Law School have been commissioned to carry out the research for us and the initial work has already started. The project will run through to June when the findings will be published.

My hope is that we increase our knowledge and skills around access to justice issues which will allow us to ensure that people's rights are upheld and we are much better placed to support advocates when questions arise about legal representation. We will tell you more when this work is complete and published on our website.

Sam Cairns

Training for Advocates March – October 2010



Developing Community Circles

Tuesday 16th March 2010, 6.30pm -9.30pm, Partick Office

Learn about circles of friends and how to support your advocacy partner to increase their opportunities to make ordinary, supportive friendships. This event is aimed at citizen advocates who have completed orientation and are matched in a long term partnership, but is open to all citizen and crisis advocates.

An Overview of the Laws Affecting the People we Support

Thursday 27th May 2010, 6.30-9.30, Partick Office

Learn about the three key pieces of legislation affecting people with learning disabilities: The Mental Health Act, Adults with Incapacity Act and The Adult Support and Protection Act. This event is aimed at crisis advocates, but may be of interest to some citizen advocates as well.

Developing Effective Advocacy Skills

Tuesday 22nd June 2010, 6.30-9.30, Partick Office

An opportunity to think about how you advocate for your partner and to further develop your skills. This event is aimed at all citizen and crisis advocates, but might be of interest to newer advocates.

Adult Support and Protection and Dealing with Sensitive Information

Saturday 9th October 2010, 10am-4pm, Partick Office

Learn more about the Adult Support and Protection Act, what we mean by harm, what should happen if someone is thought to be being harmed and how to react if your partner discloses some sensitive information. This event is aimed at all citizen and crisis advocates.

If you are interested in attending any of these training events and want to find out more or to book a place, please contact Amanda Muir at the Partick Office, on 337 3133.

Advocacy does work...

We have been following with interest, the recent campaigns in Edinburgh City and Western Isles Council supported by the Learning Disability Alliance Scotland (LDAS). LDAS and the people involved in their campaigns got themselves really organised and pushed hard to get the Councils to take note of public opinion. They sought legal advice and threatened challenges in court. They organised mass protests, lobbied politicians and organised demonstrations.

Both campaigns have prompted Councils to stop and think again. There are too many details to tell you about everything in this article, but have a look at www. Idascotland.org for the full story.

Join us at Equal Say's Ceilidh & Disco



As you know, we have held a number of social events over the years so that everyone involved with Equal Say can get together. If you are new to Equal Say, it's a great opportunity to meet others who share your values and if you have been with us for a while, then come along to meet some old friends. If you know anyone who might like to be involved with Equal Say, why not bring them with you?

Ceilidhs have always been popular; this year we thought we'd try something just a little bit different and have a Ceilidh and Disco combined. So, whether you prefer a reel or a boogie, come along for a great night. There will be soft drinks and snacks. There is no bar, but you are welcome to bring your own bottle. We will have a raffle; donations of raffle prizes will be gratefully received.

This year we are having the social in a Church Hall in Partick, just up the road from our office. On the night staff will be outside to help direct you to the entrance.

Tickets are just **£3 per person**, and can be bought in advance from your coordinator or the office. Alternatively, you can buy a ticket on the door.

St. Peter's Church Hall. White Street, Partick Friday 23rd April at 7.30pm until 10.30pm

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